

THE TOILERS OF THE SEA

BY
REV. NEHEMIAH BOYNTON, D. D.

ANNUAL SERMON

BEFORE

The American Seamen's Friend Society

AT ITS

EIGHTY-SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY

SUNDAY, MAY 9TH, 1915

BY THE

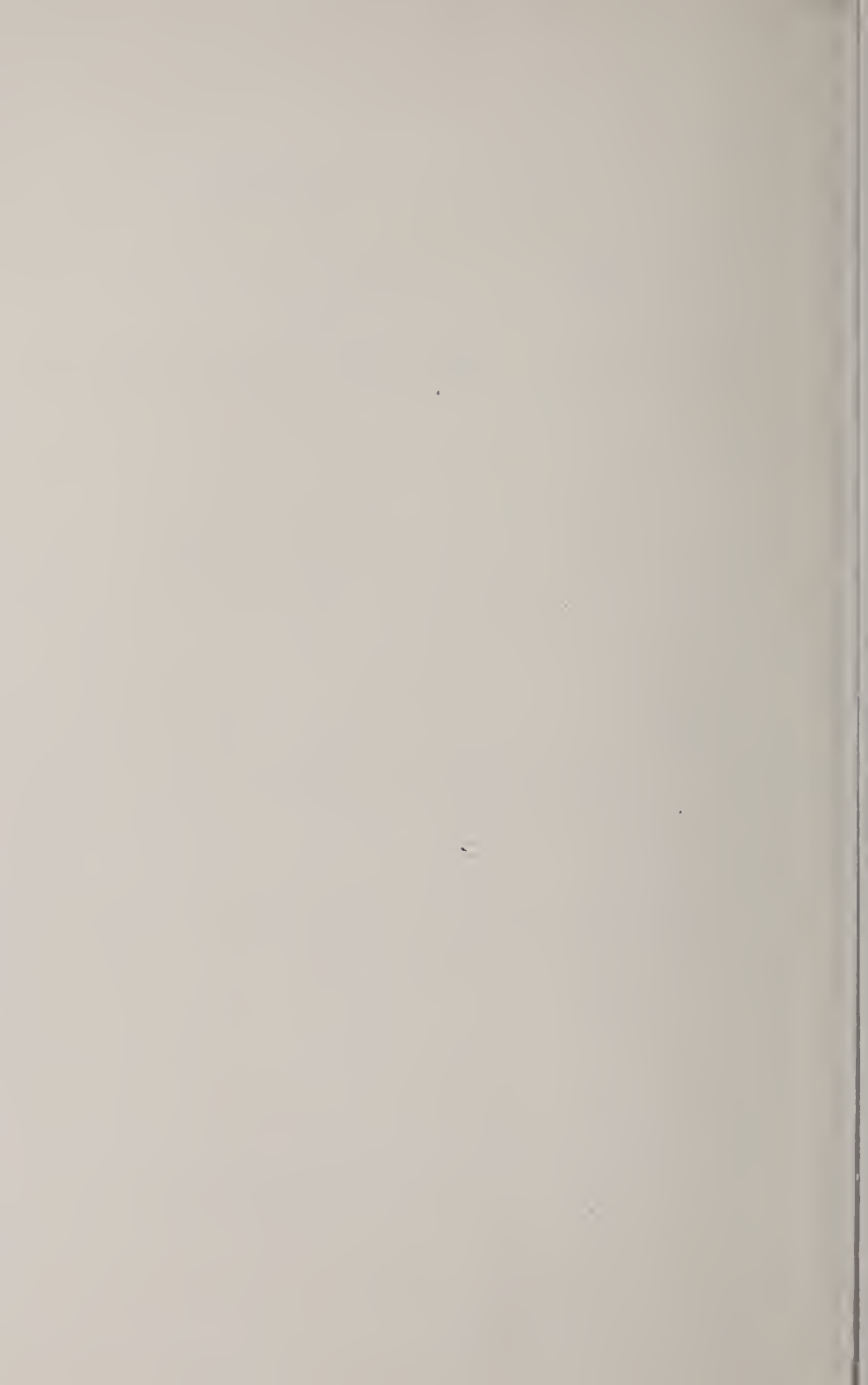
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IN THE

CLINTON AVENUE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

THE AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY
76 WALL STREET, NEW YORK

1915



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Ps. 77: 19. "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known."

The meagre appreciation of the sea which has characterized the world at large is rapidly being supplanted by the knowledge of its importance as "sea power." Many people have marvelled as to God's reason for flooding three-quarters of the earth's surface with water and like the man who declared that if he had made this awkward world, health should have been catching instead of disease, so there have been others whose plan of the universe would have included no more sea; no more wonders of the deep; no ships staggering to and fro like a drunken man; no quiet harbors and no mad foam-crested waves. How fortunate that God Himself made the world and that the "spirit of God moved upon the surface of the waters," and that God said "let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters!"

It is probably the unconquerable nature of the sea, which has prejudiced humanity. The inefficiency of the human instrument battling against its storms; the unrelentless cruelty of it, when once helpless humanity is in its grip, and the far reach of it toward the unknown, with its mystery and silence. The ships which sail away, but never come back; all these lend a sombre hue to that which humanity seems to enjoy calling, "the salt, unplumbed, estranging sea." But what if the sea, so far from being an enemy, was a friend; what if it were a very good friend; so good that the world is under bonds to it impossible of satisfaction; so good that while we mitigate its terrors, and control its anger by our lighthouses and buoys; by our charts and compasses; by our liners and men-of-war; by our international treaties and hospitalities, we would change our old-time spirit of enmity to a modern gratitude and confess our advancing knowledge of the significance of His footsteps, whose ways are in the sea.

The sea is a boy's friend. Of course there are fond mammas, plenty of them, who as they say "so dread the water," but they forget that while the water not seldom ducks their boys, it very seldom drowns them, and they are better off, safer physically and morally, in trying their strength against the sea, filling their lungs

with its bracing air, beholding its wonders and hearing the music of the voice of God amid its thundering billows, than in riding across country in automobiles with their smelling tanks, the quacking horns, and their invitation to soft luxury and inactive lassitude. The sea is the finest gymnasium for an active American boy, and parents who are seriously engaged in the task of making men out of their lads, will not be unwise in shunting their fear and dread, giving their boys a boat, and taking the sea into partnership in their man-making business.

The sea is the mother's friend. How bare most homes would look if stripped of the bric-a-brac and the essential furnishings which the sailor has brought. How meagre the breakfast table, too, if the linen cloth, the china, the fruit, the coffee, the sugar, and all else which have traveled over sea to minister to family comfort, should be eliminated.

The sea is the father's friend. When it no longer becomes a common carrier, as is to some extent true to-day, immediately his business registers the decline. Business lives by virtue of the sea.

The sea is the artist's friend. The imagination revels in the sea, and whether it expresses itself in music, or painting, or poetry, the mood, the wistfulness and the mystery of the sea, is its daily manna. Subtract the sea from the imagination, and immediately it becomes "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean." Poetry and prose apart, with no riparian rights, would be barren as a deserted isle. The sea is a gift to the imagination, of priceless value. Every one of us is in his imagination a "Sea Gypsy."

"I am wearied with the sunset
I am fretful with the bay
For the wander thirst is on me
And my soul is in Cathay.

There's a schooner in the offing
With her topsails shot with fire
And my soul has gone aboard her
For the Island of Desire.

I must forth again to-morrow
And at midnight I shall be
Hull down on the trail of rapture
In the wonder of the sea."

We are all of us poets in a way. There is a lilt and a rhythm in us, every one. Who does not recall to-day his favorite nook by the sea or his boat and tug hard against the cruel fate which binds him to his toil when he would seek his loved waters? Who does not sing

"I must go down to the seas again,
To the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship
And a star to steer her by.
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sails shaking
And a gray mist on the sea's face
And a gray dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again,
To the vagrant gypsy life
To the gull's way and the whale's way,
Where the wind 's like a whetted knife,
And all I ask is a merry yarn
From a laughing fellow rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream
When the long trick's over."

The sea is a friend of religion. A man whose faith is an experience rather than an exegesis, continually uses the symbol of the sea for the expression of his soul passion. Take the sea out of the Bible, and what a subtraction. If Jesus had never sat by the seaside; had never entered into a boat and pushed from the shore; had never been in a storm; had never uttered the solacing words "Peace, be still," would not the Gospel be shorn of something of its adequacy, robustness and finer meaning? Many a man has deposited his faith for its expression in the metaphors of the sea.

"Once on the raging seas I rode,
The night was dark, the storm was loud.
The ocean yawned and rudely blowed
The wind that tossed my foundering bark.
Deep horror then my eyelids closed;
Death struck, I ceased the tide to stem;
When suddenly a star arose,
It was the Star of Bethlehem.

It was my guide, my light, my all,
It bade my dark forebodings cease,
And through the storm and danger's thrall
It led me to the port of peace.
Now safely moored, my trial's o'er,
I'll sing first in night's royal diadem,
Forever and forever more,
The star, the Star of Bethlehem.

Religion would indeed be impoverished if there were no sea whose metaphors should be the vehicles of its longing, its aspiration and its hope.

The sea is the patriot's friend. It is his friend through its natural defense and per contra, through its uniting power. The ideas of our forefathers could never have prevailed except for the sea. There was no adequate chance for them in England, nor in Holland, but on the stern and rockbound coast, with three thousand miles of open water between them and those who disputed their ideal, the opportunity was afforded for the growth, the maturity and the strengthening of those ideas, which to-day are gripping the heart of the world. But not only for defence, the sea is also the great purveyor of advancing ideas. It is as true to-day, as it has always been historically, that the progressive nations have not been the inland nations, but the maritime nations. "It was never a Babylon or a Timbuctoo, or any city of the inland regions that was forward to change and improvement. But it was a Tyre, queen of the sea; a Carthage sending out her ships beyond the pillars of Hercules to Britain and the northern isles; an Athens, and Alexandria—these were the seats of art and thought and learning, and liberal improvement of every sort."

The nation which has the longest coast line has the greatest human opportunity. For it is through the interchange of ideas and of industries, of capital and of customs, that the world advances. A pent up Utica may be smug enough, but it can never develop merchants of Venice, for "the sails of commerce are the wings of truth," and it is the interchange of great ideas which is the condition of human advancement.

The greatest question before the world to-day, probably is the question of who shall command the sea. Shall it be one nation, which while building itself into maritime power has unquestionably been a mighty benediction to the world at large? Or has the time arrived when an international guardianship of the sea shall secure its freedom and benefaction to all the nations of the earth equally? No nation can be more keenly interested in the mighty question than America, whose interests apparently increasingly require that the friendship of the sea may be made possible to all the nations of the earth. But this question of the command of the sea, whatever the immediate answer may be, inevitably secures for the sea, a new appraisal and a re-affirmation of the essential nature of its relationship to developing life. In man's great struggle to subdue nature, his tools have been the plough for the land, and the ship for the sea.

By developing his plough and his ship he has gradually secured his mastery over the elements, but his plough would have been a petty tool, save for the reinforcement of his ship and the land would have still been a wilderness but for the deliverance and the development afforded by the sea.

It is evident from what has been said, that with the growing appreciation of the sea, the importance of the sailor as a human asset must also be confessed. He is no inconsequential or insignificant member of the human society. Since steam has revolutionized ocean transportation, the sailor cult has broadened, bounded no longer simply by the able-bodied seaman who can hand reef and steer, but must include the engineers and the oilers, the stokers and the stewards; in fact, all on shipboard, whose team work contributes to the efficiency and safety of the ship. This means the presence of the skilled mechanic with his specialized mind and his superior craftsmanship, and on the whole, lifting the sailor cult in efficiency and importance. It is a singular fact that while the farmer with his plough has been permitted to share adequately in his conquest of nature, until to-day, he belongs to the properly compensated class and the sailor has been largely overlooked as sharing the wealth he has created. He is poorly paid for his work. His accommodations are not too luxurious, and his place in human society more humble far, than his abilities and achievements would suggest. Perhaps the real reason for this is, that he is a sailor, a sea rover, a detached spirit, while the farmer is a man of locality with a permanent home. But in any event, no man brings such contributions to the world and in return receives such meagre recompense, as does the sailor. His calling makes great contribution to his life. His strength is established by his opposition to wind and wave and his courage by the conquest of adverse surroundings. New countries bring new sights and new ideas, and thus his mind becomes quick and well stored. Danger enlarges his sympathies so that he is probably the most generous type of humanity in existence. He could never be shrewd in a trade, but he could share what he had with a stranger, in a manner to compel admiration. His whole character seems to be free from those astringent qualities which make landmen so sharp and cunning and exacting, while into it seems to have been put something of the boundlessness, the sufficiency and the royal camaraderie of the tumultuous and unmeasured ocean. Even his vices, horrible as vice always is, have a certain blunt and out in the open quality about them, which while offering no apology for them, makes them in a

way, understandable. They are very largely the uncontrolled reaction in society of elemental instincts released from long and tantalizing solitude. When religious, he is the most simple hearted and wholesome of spirits. Genuineness is his essential characteristic. He is the last man in the world to ask for help ashore; his independence is absolute; but he is the first man to need help, and no man is more grateful for the consideration of his fellows, if it be offered not as a pious dole of oily charity, but as a warm-hearted hand of friendliness. He has ashore the needs of every other man; he wants something for his body, something for his mind, and something for his soul. It is this man-to-man ministry which for more than four score years The American Seamen's Friend Society has been offering the sailor. We have placed our representatives at various ports in the world, and without ostentation, calliopes or brass bands, have been doing and are still doing a most essential work of interpreting the sympathy of the landsman for his brother who follows the sea. To-day in New York, there are twenty-six thousand men from our Navy, ashore. In their blues, they are both natty and impressive; they comprise a great company, but they do not represent one-half the daily average of sailors in New York City, for we have over fifty thousand every day of the year along the water-front. What can we do for him? First, he wants a place to eat, to sleep, to spend his leisure hours. He wants a place to trade where his disabilities in bargaining, will not be capitalized in the interests of the greedy store-keeper, and where he can write a letter home. How little the world realizes what writing a letter means to unaccustomed people. He wants a place where he can play an innocent game, smoke his pipe and chat with his shipmates. To furnish such a place as this under inspiring auspices, is no ignoble business. It is a great undertaking. There are plenty of places which will furnish these, as decoys and snares, but the number is not great which afford them out of wholesome sympathy.

The sailor's mind should not be a negligible quantity. Carlyle once said, that it made a great difference whether the Indian in the Rocky Mountains was beating his squaw in his tepee, or hunting bears, for if he was beating his wife, the price of skins and furs would steadily rise in London. So it makes a great difference what the sailor is thinking about; what ideas are in the fore-castle and the after-hatch of his mind. Noble thoughts will lift his soul as really as that of any other man, and ignoble thoughts will torpedo it. Since 1859, our Society has been putting libraries on shipboard. To-day we have

three thousand libraries afloat. More than a thousand libraries have been made accessible to our Navy boys in blue. They include books of travel and romance, of science and biography, books for laughter and books for thought, books for morals and books for religion, books which make their appeal to the many-sided mind of the sailor, affording him the same recreations and inspirations which good books yield to us prosaic landmen, and with the same chance of rousing in him as in us "those thoughts that wake to perish never." It is a good investment of twenty dollars to furnish the man who travels around the world, with diverting, entertaining, inspiring, clean thoughts.

The soul of the sailor is human, too, like any other. It isn't safe to assume that because he is not a regular church attendant through the exigencies of his calling, that his soul never speaks to him, and that the still small voice never falls upon his attentive ear. He knows the sting of a guilty conscience as well as anybody else, and feels the longing for the pardoning love of God, as keenly as any other human being. Kipling's description of the old engineer McAndrews, who when not busy with his engine when the sea was glass, and the winds were zephyrs, talked with his own soul, is an exhibit of that feeling of sinfulness and need which is in the hold of every sailor's heart.

"What I ha' seen since ocean steam began
Leaves me no doot for the machine: but what about the man?
The man that counts, wi' all his runs, one million mile o' sea:
Four time the span from earth to moon
How far, O Lord, from Thee?

Marks! I ha' marks o' more than burns—deep in my soul an' black,
An' times like this, when things go smooth, my *wickudness* comes
back.

The sins o' four and forty years, all up an' down the seas,
Clack an' repeat like valves half-packed
Forgie's our trespasses."

Nor can we forget a perfectly human experience of Mulholland who repaired his broken contract with God; forgetting God in pleasant weather, Mulholland, like many other people, remembered Him in storm and in presence of the terror of the tempest, made great promises as the price of deliverance. But the roll of the sea threw him violently against a stanchion injuring him most seriously, making it necessary for him to

"Lay still for seven weeks convalescing of the fall,
An' readin' the shiny Scripture texts in the Seamen's Hospital.

An' I spoke to God of our Contract, an' He says to my prayer :
"I never puts on My ministers no more than they can bear.
"So back you go to the cattle boats an' preach My Gospel there.

I didn't want to do it, for I knew what I should get, *
An' I wanted to preach Religion, handsome an' out of the wet, *
But the Word of the Lord were lain on me, an' I done what I was set. *

An' I sign for four pound ten a month and save the money clear,
An' I am in charge of the lower deck, an' I never lose a steer ;
An' I believe in Almighty God an' I preach His Gospel here."

The sailor's soul has equal need with every other in the Universe and should have greater sympathy because of the inevitable relationships of his life, which detract from, and somewhat restrict, the areas of his spirit's advantage. The American Seamen's Friend Society through its Missionaries, its Institutes, and its Chapels, strives to touch the whole life of the sailor and render to him his due when ashore, of human friendliness and sympathy. Our Sailors' Home and Institute on the western water-front in New York is his "comfort bag" ashore, and stands forever as the beacon light of our interest in and love for the men who go down to the sea in ships and do business in the great waters.

As a matter of requital for value received ; as a matter of strategy for bringing in the Kingdom ; as a matter of love for the elevation of individual life, The American Seamen's Friend Society is worthy of increasing Christian interest and Christian investment, for the footsteps of God are increasingly known as the world advances, of God, "whose way is in the sea and whose path is in the great waters."

